

Colouring THE CLASSICS

Many of Hollywood's classic black-and-white masterpieces are getting the colour treatment, and the storms of protest are beginning to echo and reverberate around the industry. Modern computer technology is being used to put colour to films like *Casablanca*, *On The Waterfront*, *Citizen Kane*, *Psycho*, *Sunset Boulevard*, and scores of others.

The thought of Gregg Toland's superb atmospheric lighting for the Welles masterpiece *Citizen Kane* being coloured, seems nothing short of sacrilegious. What will we make of a computer-coloured Bogart and Bergman in 'colourful' *Casablanca*? Or the eerie, sinister Bates Motel of Hitchcock's starkly terrifying *Psycho* being turned into colourful hues with, no doubt, a preference for gory red in that shower sequence when the unfortunate Janet Leigh fell foul of a crazed, psychotic Anthony Perkins. And will the waters of Gloria Swanson's swimming pool in Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard*, superbly photographed in glorious black-and-white, be 'blued' and then 'reddened' by the blood of a shot William Holden in that famous sequence?

A couple of American computer companies are convinced we can't wait to see some of our favourite black-and-white movies revealed in a new light of colourful shades. The investment is enormous, while the clever process is laborious and painstaking in the extreme. An average 90-minute film is estimated to cost around 200,000 dollars for the colour treatment. Every minute of film taking about four hours to colour. I won't attempt to explain the difficult, complex, technical details suffice to say that the end results are proving quite remarkable.

What is of much greater concern is this tampering around with Hollywood history. George Stevens Jr, chairman of the Board of the American Film Institute says it will be "a plague on the history of American film. A generation from now, no viewer will have a sure sense of how the world was seen through the eyes of John Ford, William Wyler, Alfred Hitchcock, Orson Welles or any of the great figures who did so much to define American moviemaking."

The Directors Guild of Great Britain is also lending its weight to the growing protests about computer colouring. It issued a statement proclaiming that the process was an "exploitation of the most degrading kind." Fred Zimmermann, the President and the maker of such classic b/w movies as *High Noon*, *The Men* and *From Here To Eternity* says that "if the great black and white pictures of David Lean and Carol Reed were to be coloured, future generations would have no idea what the originals were like".

Computer technology has now made it possible to add colour to old black and white films. Ken Ferguson looks at this controversial new practice . . .



It's A Wonderful Life — now in glorious colour

The late Alfred Hitchcock's reaction to the fact that *Psycho* was to be turned into colour, would have been most interesting. Likely he would also have seen 'red'. Hitch himself has already been a victim of computered colouring. Those old black-and-white introductions he fronted for the thriller series, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* were turned into colour for a new series. The previous stories, filmed in the Fifties and Sixties were re-cast and updated, but the original Hitchcock intros remained as they were filmed except that now Hitch had colour in those chubby cheeks.

This new modern art form of colouring the classics is about to become a big booming business in America, which according to one of the computer companies involved could yield a billion dollar profit within 15 years. But clearly it's an innovation which has its motivation in commercial interests, based on the high expectation that TV will pay more for movies in colour.

'Selling' a black-and-white movie to TV viewers and those who buy or hire

video cassettes, isn't easy, but there are of course exceptions. Woody Allen loves making movies in black-and-white, and Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull* didn't suffer at the box-office because it was filmed in black-and-white.

As intriguing a prospect of seeing many b/w movie classics in colour might be, I suspect that old favourites are better left alone. The purists may well be up in arms, but even they will find it hard to resist seeing the likes of *Psycho*, *Casablanca*, *On The Waterfront*, *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, *High Noon*, *Sunset Boulevard* and many many more, when they eventually arrive on our small screens in glorious computerised colour. And, if they don't like what modern state-of-the-art has done to a now bygone Hollywood art form, well they can always adjust their telly set and turn them back into what they once were — black-and-white movies.

■ The Video Collection have now released a coloured version of Frank Capra's *It's A Wonderful Life*. Available from High Street outlets from £8.99.